

ÁRPÁD DEBRECZENI

(24 April, 1911 – 12 September, 1984)

dharti-kē bāsiyōñ-kī muktī pritmēñ hai
"For those living on Earth, salvation is in
Love!"

(Iqbal)

On behalf of the Chair of Indo-European Linguistics of the Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Arts and the Society of Classical Studies, I pay my last respect to Árpád Debreczeni, Candidate of Linguistic Sciences. Honorary Lecturer of the Chair, the distinguished scholar of the Hindi language. The land of Transylvania gave Him to Hungarian scholarship, just as Sándor Kőrösi Csoma, and his road to scholarly fame was neither easy, nor simple. After finishing secondary school and matriculation, he took two university diplomas: Doctorate of Laws at Kecskemét and completed his studies in English – German languages at the Faculty of Arts of the Budapest University. His interest and excellent command of languages nevertheless attracted him to the field of translation and interpreting and as a result he spent years working in the National Agricultural Library until 1956, when he became a civil servant at the Indian Embassy.

This event brought about a decisive turn in his life. The language environment and his scope of activity soon aroused his interest towards Hindi, the national language of India, inspiring such an absorption in the study of this language that he became a scholar and university lecturer of this language. He, with excellent perception, recognized the most important problems of Hindi studies: the stratification of the vocabulary and the continuous enrichment of the language through reforms, the exceptional complexity of the verbal system, the significance of the verbal periphrasis and the unelucidated state of Hindi intonation. Until India became independent, Hindi was the stepson of Indology, the attention of which during its zenith in the last century was focussed on Sanscrit, a highly developed, artistic and culture bearing language, and the invaluable Sanskrit literature. Since Hindi became the national language of India, its importance increased enormously. As a result of his researches, Árpád Debreczeni became not only the founder of Hindi studies in our country, but contributed significantly to the international development of modern linguistic research related to Hindi.

On two occasions, in 1964 and 1979, he made longer research journeys to India during which he not only improved his knowledge of Hindi,

but collected linguistic materials for his professional works. Beside his numerous studies of importance which analysed with modern linguistic conception the structure of Hindi language, three important scientific works of him had matured and come to completion amidst his tiresome civil work and university lectures. He was the first to elicit the complex and only marginally treated question of Hindi intonation in his monograph on the subject, for which he received the candidate degree of linguistic sciences. His book the "Hindi Language", which is an excellent collection of his knowledge and that of his research concerning the structure was published nearly a year ago. Last, but not least his work of utmost importance from the viewpoint of future development of Hindi studies in Hungary is the "Hindi-Hungarian Dictionary", the publication of which he unfortunately could not live long enough to see.

Behind this rich lifetime-work there stands a library size scholarly translation-work. Through decades he assisted the English publishing work of the Publishing House of the Hungarian Academy, the Acta and monographs with translations into English, frequently from Russian, which works were always characterized by his scholarly preciseness.

His scientific achievements brought him acknowledgement. The National Postgraduate Degree Granting Board awarded to him a candidate's degree, while the Faculty of Arts of Eötvös Loránd University honoured him with the lecturer's degree. But perhaps the greatest acknowledgement meant for him was the reception by hundreds of students of his lecture delivered in Hindi on the subject of Hindi intonation in 1979 at the Delhi University.

Árpád Debreczeni was the pioneer of Hungarian research in the field of Hindi. He laid the foundation for the study of Hindi, its university education while training students, who would continue his research and his work. The acknowledge of Hindi as a national language and its use in India is a difficult, complex, tension filled and controversial process, at the background of which a Hindi and Muslim culture, a Hindi and Urdu antagonism smoulders. Only a true human being, as was Árpád Debreczeni, was able to succeed in resolving this situation, who discovered the great truth which was worded by Iqbal, the great Urdu poet written in pure Hindi language as follows: *dhartī-kē bāsiyōñ-kī muktī prītmēñ hai*, "For those living on Earth, salvation is in Love!". Setting out from his Transylvanian homeland — as Sándor Kőrösi Csoma — he found what he searched for here in Hungary, for the benefit of Hungarian scholarship. Thus, the beautiful words of Mihály Váczy fit him as well as Sándor Kőrösi Csoma:

"he believed — there must be somewhere an original home
Set out You too, look for your home
— a wide-world you arrive.
Look up, understand, look up this kinsfolk
— and will find humanity at home, too!"

Árpád Debreczeni brought home and left for us what he had learned and studied: the knowledge of Hindi, the national language of India, the tools of this knowledge and with it true integrity as well, the salvation of which lies in love. His pioneer work will be continued by his disciples and his memory will be preserved with great reverence.*

J. Harmatta

* Farewell speech delivered at the funeral of Árpád Debreczeni on the 26th September 1984.